DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 872 SP 012 793

AUTHOR Gerard, Glen K.; And Others
TITLE Focus on Physical Education, Intramurals and Interscholastics.
INSTITUTION Michigan Association of Middle School Educators, East Lansing.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 17p.
AVAILABLE FROM MAMSE, Michigan State University, 406 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824 ($2.00)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Athletic Programs; Athletics; *Extramural Athletic Programs; Individual Differences; *Intramural Athletic Programs; *Middle Schools; Motor Development; Personal Growth; *Physical Education; Program Design; Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

Physical education, intramurals, and interscholastics are often key areas of study for staffs working to provide for the physical needs of the middle school child. This paper gives direction to the development of programs in physical education in this area. A brief analysis of the problems involved in physical education at the middle school level is followed by a position statement by the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators (MAMSE) on physical education, intramurals, and interscholastics. This position emphasizes that intramural sports should be the central objective in middle school physical education. A brief description of the learner is provided as well as a statement of middle school purpose, generalizations from literature on the subject, and identification of key program components. Practical ideas for making programs beneficial for the individual student are suggested. A source guide to reading materials is included. (JD)

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FOCUS ON PHYSICAL EDUCATION, INTRAMURALS AND INTERSCHOLASTICS

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To the Reader:

This is the first of a series of "FOCUS PAPERS" on topics related to the middle school. Other topics will center on Evaluation, Exploratory, Team Teaching, Enrichment Activities, Scheduling, Dramatic Play, Characteristics of a Middle School, etc. Every effort will be made to include teachers, principals, parents, and college personnel to develop this series. Your comments will be appreciated.

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This is a Middle School, filmstrip-cassette, by Addie Kinsinger and Louis G. Romano, $19.95 (Available in June 1978)
This filmstrip-cassette is an excellent presentation of the characteristics of a middle school. Can be used for both teacher in-service or for parent groups that are interested in the middle school.

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Introduction

The physical needs of children are extremely important during the middle school years. Frequently, physical needs of the transescent have a direct bearing on mental, social, and emotional needs. A good middle school must provide for the physical needs of children in all areas of the program. This is the concept of the "ideal man" followed by the ancient Greeks—a sound mind and body go hand in hand.

Physical education, intramurals and interscholastics, often are key areas of study for the staffs who are working to provide for the physical needs of the middle school aged child. This FOCUS paper gives some clear direction to the development of programs in physical education, intramurals and interscholastics in the middle school program.

This paper contains eight basic sections:

1) a statement of the problem;
2) the MAMSE position on physical education, intramurals and interscholastics;
3) a brief description of the nature of the learner;
4) a statement of middle school purpose;
5) some generalizations from the literature;
6) identification of key program components;
7) some practical ideas for making programs beneficial for the transescent and
8) a source guide to reading materials.

Statement of the Problem

One basic purpose of the middle school is to help *all* students meet their physical needs. In some communities this part of the program for children is implemented primarily through interscholastic athletics. Pressures from coaches and parent groups frequently cause large amounts of available resources to be allocated for the athletic program. Excellence in interscholastic athletics becomes the number one goal. But only a small percentage of the students profit. The limited remaining resources must provide for the remaining large majority of students. The result commonly is a less than adequate program for meeting the physical needs of most of the children in school. Additionally, the very nature of interscholastic athletic programs tends to eliminate participation for many students, develop the early maturer, emphasize winning and serve more the needs of adults than students.

Middle school programs need to be developed which provide for meeting the needs of all children, not just a chosen few. Each child must be considered when educational experiences are planned. Resources must be allocated in a manner which allows each child to receive equal and optimum benefit.

The MAMSE Position

The ideal middle school provides resources (staff, facility, equipment, materials) to insure a meaningful program of *DAILY PHYSICAL EDUCATION* for each child.[1]

When adequate resources have been provided for a strong daily physical education program, those resources (staff, facility, equipment, materials) should be provided to insure a meaningful program of *INTRAMURAL* activity which is available to each child on a daily basis.

THE MAMSE POSITION IS THAT PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND INTRAMURALS MUST BE THE PRIMARY FOCUS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS. Interscholastic athletics as traditionally implemented should not receive emphasis in middle school programs.

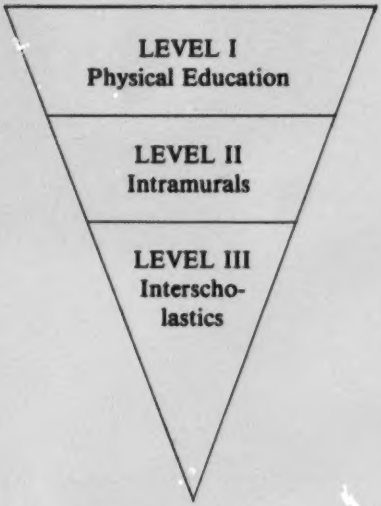
Full implementation of a meaningful physical education program and intramural program is the highest priority. If the above condition is met, a middle school program may include some interscholastic activity that is available to "every" student. Interscholastic activity should be considered only when a fully developed physical education program and intramural program are in existence. The inverted pyramid on the next page describes the hierarchy of emphasis which should be placed on physical education, intramurals and interscholastics to insure a beneficial program for middle school children.

[1]Definition of Terms:

Physical Education: Physical education is a program of formal class instruction where prescribed physical education experiences are provided for all boys and girls during regularly scheduled periods.

Intramurals: An intramural program is a supplement to the regular physical education program with the purpose of providing an opportunity for students who desire participation in physical activities beyond that offered daily in the physical education classes.

Interscholastics: Are those activities which permit the more physically gifted students to represent a school in competition with representation from other schools and that involve seasonal schedules, organized practices, competition and sometimes championships.



Adequate resources must be provided for Level I before considering Level II. Adequate resources must be provided for Levels I and II before considering Level III. And once Level II is reached, it must be monitored to insure that resources are not diverted from Levels I and II to enhance Level III.

This position is based on the belief that children ages 10-14 are experiencing one of the most difficult stages in life—transescence. This is what is considered to be physically, socially, emotionally and mentally most healthy for the middle school age child. Attempting to help children meet their needs means that every resource available (staff, facilities, time materials and equipment) must be used effectively for the development of a program beneficial to all children.

The Nature of the Leader

A Description of Needs: There are several factors that influence a child's learning. Certain needs must be met if a middle school child is to become a fully functional person and thus an effective learner. All middle school children have the *physical* needs of nutrition, activity, rest, and bodily requirements, as well as the need for a safe and orderly environment. There is a need for *social* acceptance, particularly by peers, but not limited to them. Children want and need to receive

recognition for achievements or progress they make toward meeting their goals. Middle school children need to feel that they belong and that others care about them. Every individual has need for *intellectual* stimulation, challenge and creative expression. Each child needs the opportunity to develop different ways of expressing abilities and ideas. Every individual has an *emotional* need to develop in his unique style. There is a need to have the opportunity to learn about self and to explore, change and develop attitudes, values and beliefs. They need to plan, make decisions and use evidence of being able to change their environment as a result of their personal actions.

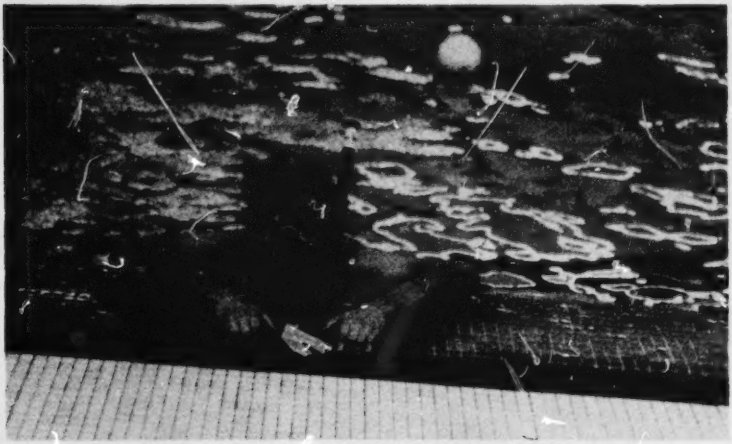
A Description of Behavior: The behaviors of middle school children are clear evidence of the growing-up process. It is important to recognize that one common element in describing the behavior of middle school children is diversity. The behavior of a child is erratic and often found at opposite extremes within a short period of time. The behavior of a group of children shows diversity and extremes. Behavior reflects the wide range in maturation (developmental) levels found among middle school children. The behavior which children exhibit in the middle school years coincides closely with their needs. More effort is expended to meet social, emotional and physical needs prior to the meeting of mental needs.

A Description of Learning: When we consider physical education, intramurals and interscholastics for middle school children, research and experience suggest that the following are critical. Learning is inherent in human beings and is the means by which change occurs. Learning takes place when experiences need fulfilling, relevant to values and analogous to past experiences. As the individual interacts with his environment, he learns. Learning is not always in a positive direction, but it takes place and change does occur.

Behaviors which are rewarded or reinforced are those which are most likely to recur. The reinforcement must follow almost immediately after the desired behavior if the learner is to make a connection between reward and behavior. As a learning tool, repetition is relatively ineffective unless the learner can relate that repetition very directly to his own experience. Threat and punishment have varied and uncertain effects upon learning, and, generally, accomplish very little; certainly, less than rewarding and reinforcing.

People learn most effectively when they can identify future use for the learning. Learning also has a much greater chance of being used in the future if it is utilized immediately following the learning.

Children, like adults, tend to remember information which confirms previously held attitudes much better than information which runs contrary to previous attitudes.



Snorkeling—an intermural lifelong activity.

There are variations among children regarding: (1) readiness for any learning and (2) how rapidly a child is able to learn a given skill or idea. Readiness and speed of learning are a product of many variables: physical maturation; prior learning experiences; the student's value system; the student's beliefs about the relevance of the learning and his feelings about self, home and teachers.

Learning is more likely to be supported by the learner if he or she feels a sense of choice or participation in selecting the learning activity. When a person is not involved in determining those things which are to be learned, the commitment to that learning is minimized.

There does not appear to be any subject in the school which is superior to others in strengthening a person's learning skills.

Purpose of the Middle School

The intended purpose of the middle school program is to provide all children with opportunity to meet their needs. Each child is important and must be provided for. Resources must be allocated in a manner which insures that every child will have an equal opportunity to meet his learning needs. In addition, provision must be made for the total child. A positive balance on emphasis must be maintained between the

physical, social, emotional and mental needs of the child. Each need is important and must be given attention.

The environment of the middle school must be one in which children are respected for their differences—differences in need intensity, learning style, physical development and social-emotional maturity. The adults of the school must conduct themselves in a manner which conveys to children the message that each child is important and will have equal opportunity to meet physical, social, emotional and mental learning needs. Adult and child behavior should focus on the present and future personal welfare and safety of each child.

The school environment should provide for the reality of competition; however, for middle school age children the effort should be directed primarily toward competition with self. When competition is fostered between middle school children it should build on success and personal strength building, not on failures and weakness identification. The thrust should be to help all middle school children develop a personal power base, learn the skills to cope with life-problems and different life styles, and muster the courage to learn and improve with every experience.

Generalizations from the Literature

There are some generalizations which can be drawn from the literature regarding this topic. The following paragraphs support the view that emphasis should be placed first on a sound physical education program; second, on intramurals and last, on traditional interscholastic athletics.

1. Much of the psychological development and socialization which occurs with the transescent is a result of the entry he makes into the peer group culture. Adult intervention into the arena of children's games has questionable positive effect on the growth of children. On the contrary, there is a distinct possibility that adult interference (which frequently is most intense in interscholastic athletics) may cause damage to the natural process of growing up.

2. Transescent children are not physically mature adults. Adult activities are frequently too strenuous for the normal development of middle school age children. In addition, there is a wide difference in physical development at this age and chronological age certainly is not an accurate indicator of physiological age. Determining the level of physical development is extremely difficult. Thus, adults take great

risks in providing highly competitive and strenuous physical activity for children who may not be physically mature in bone development and muscular strength.

3. Interscholastic athletics may in fact actually reduce the opportunity for children to participate. The exclusive nature of interscholastic activity is one factor. The high degree of imposed structure is another factor which reduces participation for the child. His involvement is directed by others.

4. When the middle school aged child is exposed to experiences in which he cannot be successful simply because of his physical or emotional maturity, success is minimized and desire for further positive physical activity often diminishes.

5. Intense competition for many children of middle school age may cause severe emotional damage. Being thrust into the competition of making the team or being on the first team when emotional readiness is absent, will frequently end in a failure experience and may cause permanent emotional damage. The same holds true for physical readiness. Many children are not ready emotionally and/or physically until they are 15 years or older in chronological age.

The above generalizations support the view that opportunities for positive social, emotional, mental and physical development are significantly greater for the transescent if the emphasis of the school program is placed on providing physical education and intramural activity.

Program Components

Physical Education: Resources should be allocated with priority placed on the physical education program. *Facility, equipment* and *materials* should be available to provide for both team and individual activities. Leisure time and life-long physical activity should receive the resources necessary for children to learn basic skills and develop positive attitudes.

Materials for team activities are usually quite standard. However, there is also need for good quality equipment in gymnastics, archery, golf, tennis, badminton and many other leisure time activities.

1. The physical education program should be organized so that a *definite plan of instruction* is used and each child participates.

2. Class instruction should be daily, with a period of time equal to that in other programs. These five class periods weekly should be used for physical education as in any other program in the school.

3. Class size should be no greater than that of other classes in the middle school. Individualizing instruction is as important in physical education as in any other program in the school.

4. Teaming should be encouraged to provide maximum use of teachers' strengths and flexibility in group sizes.

5. Students should have opportunities to direct some of their own activities and make choices regarding their program.

Processes for *student evaluation and measurement* should be diagnostic in nature and designed to build upon the strength of each individual. Individual goal setting and evaluation with guidance from staff is critical for the transescent. Letter grades are not necessary. However progress reports and planned parent conferences are a key part of the program.

Teachers of physical education should be fully certified and qualified. The teacher must have the mastery of the specific competencies involved in teaching physical education along with the awareness of the physical, mental, emotional and social needs of the middle school student. The teacher has the responsibility to help the student develop the skills, master the knowledge and acquire the attitudes and social qualities that will help each student become all that he is capable of becoming. The teacher shares in the responsibility of program planning, evaluation, testing, counseling and caring for equipment and facilities.

In addition, the physical education teacher has the responsibility to provide in-service for the rest of the staff regarding the importance of physical education as an integral part of the student's life-long learning.

Intramurals: An intramural program draws its strength from a strong physical education program. The materials and resources used in developing physical education program naturally carry over to successful intramural programs. But, as important as materials and resources are, the real success of intramurals lies in a school's philosophy, its desire to meet the needs of the students, its understanding of student behavior and the commitment of personnel involved in the program.

Offerings should be geared to the interests of the students and provide a variety of activities to attract their interests. Frequently these activities can take place away from the school. Canoeing, fishing, bowling, horseback riding, cycling and roller skating are some examples.

Watch that ball! Girls' Intramural Soccer.

In-school activities could include wide participation in leagues, tournaments, ladder challenges, skateboard contests, ping-pong, dance, and the like.

Often intramural activities can be effectively planned with other schools. If the activity is low-key, informal, and participation is not limited, students can gain much from interaction with students from other schools.

As time affects participation, intramurals can best be accommodated by prime time scheduling. Students should be able to participate in one or more activities each week and have an opportunity to be exposed to individual and dual as well as team activities.

An intramural program should have a designated director as planning, scheduling and organization are vital to its success. Those staff members involved in intramural programs should be paid at a rate equivalent to that paid for other extracurricular activities. Many staff members can be involved on a short-term basis to supervise those specific activities in which they have an interest and expertise. Frequently, persons from the community can become key members of an intramural program as well.

27! 52! 18! Hut! Hut! Girls' Flag Football.

Interscholastic Athletics: Interscholastic athletics should be considered only when resources have been allocated to provide an excellent physical education and intramural program. There are some children who may profit from interscholastic competition. If the program does not take resources away from physical education and intramurals or harm the individual participant, a staff may consider needs which might be met through an interscholastic program. ANY DEVELOPMENT OF INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN SHOULD BE A LAST PRIORITY AND MUST BE UNDERTAKEN WITH GREAT CAUTION.

In many communities a battle to drop interscholastic athletics may seriously damage the development of the middle school concept in the school district. There are instances where middle school staff members may not have a choice about program priorities even though they have made an intense effort to give physical education and intramurals the first consideration.

When any school considers interscholastic athletics, the following guidelines should be carefully studied and implemented:

1. All children should have the opportunity to participate. No child should be cut or excluded.
2. There should be as many teams as necessary to serve all the children who wish to participate. No team should be given higher status than another.
3. Every team should be given equal resources: facility, staff, time, materials, and equipment.
4. Every child should have equal playing time in practice and in games.
5. Coaches should be knowledgeable and trained to work with the unique needs of the transescent. They should be middle school staff only.
6. Coaches should not be evaluated based on the won-lost record achieved.
7. A physician should be "directly" involved to diagnose the physical readiness of each child and to determine the maximum level of physical exertion which can be expected.
8. Winning and competition must be kept in a positive perspective based on the needs of the child.
9. Involvement and pressure from parents and high school coaches should be kept to a minimum.
10. Interscholastic athletics are best implemented if at all at the upper grade level—usually grade eight.
11. Boys and girls must have equal treatment and opportunity.
12. A variety of activities should be available to allow for the different skills, readiness and interests of each child.

Lastly, interscholastic athletics at the middle school level is of questionable value when the needs of all children are considered. However, when an interscholastic program is attempted, the guidelines above will help keep activities in the proper perspective.

Suggested Readings

Mary F. Compton, "After the Middle School . . .?", *Michigan Journal of Secondary Education,* Summer 1971.

Wayne E. Donnehl and Jack E. Razor, "The Values of Athletics—A Critical Inquiry", *The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.* September 1971, p. 59-65.

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Lauretta Woodson, "Student Activities Programs", chapter 14, *The Intermediate Schools,* Leslie Kindred, editor, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968, p. 321.